

produced either centrally in the exchange 34 or in server system 70, and sent to said PC 50. Said PC 50 then combines the received franking mark with possible other information and prints this on the postal article 22 with the aid of printer 62. In that case, instead of working with the storage of a balance for electronic stamps on bank card 18, one franking mark per time is retrieved from the exchange 34. In this case, payments of electronic postage stamps preferably take place directly either by debiting a user's bank balance, or from bank card 18 with an electronic purse. To contend with possible fraud, the user must uniquely identify himself, for example with his giro/bank number and an associated PIN. Preferably, identification then still takes place with bank card 18 and by checking a PIN code.--

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IN THE CLAIMS:

Amend the claims as follows:

--2. (amended) The method according to Claim 1, wherein prior to step c, the unique bit string and the identification code, protected with the aid of a first message authentication code or protected by encoding, are stored by a terminal on an information carrier with memory, and step c takes place after the reading of the information carrier by a printing device.--

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--3. (amended) The method according to Claim 2, wherein besides the unique bit string and the identification code, a terminal identification code, protected with the aid of the first message authentication code or by the encoding, is also stored on the information carrier with memory by the terminal.--

--4. (twice amended) The method according to Claim 2, wherein after the reading of the information carrier by the printing device, use of the unique bit string for printing a further franking mark on a further document is rendered impossible by the printing device.--

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--5. (twice amended) The method according to Claim 2, wherein after reading the information carrier, it is checked whether the value of a counter on the information carrier lies within predefined limits, and, if this is the case, the value of the counter is adjusted after reading and step c is executed, and, if this is not the case, step c is blocked.--

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--6. (amended) The method according to Claim 1, wherein upon execution of step c, use is made of a computer and a printing device connected thereto.--

--7. (twice amended) The method according to Claim 1, wherein the identification code comprises a user identification code or a printer identification code.--

--8. (twice amended) The method according to Claim 1, wherein on the basis of the franking mark a second message authentication code is calculated and that this also is printed or the franking mark is printed in encoded form.--

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--9. (twice amended) The method according to Claim 1, wherein the set of unique bit strings is stored in a first central memory, used combinations of identification codes and unique bit strings are stored in a second central memory, franking marks printed on documents are read in, combinations of identification codes and unique bit strings which are present in the ~~read-in~~ franking marks are stored in a third central memory and are compared to the used combinations in the second central memory.--

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--11. The system for printing a franking mark according to Claim 10, wherein said system comprises a terminal and a printing device, said terminal being arranged to store, prior to step c, the unique bit string together with the identification code, protected with the aid of a first message authentication code or protected by encoding, on an

information carrier with memory, and the printing device is arranged to execute step c after reading the information carrier.--

--12. (amended) The system according to Claim 11, wherein the terminal is arranged to send a copy of either the unique bit string together with the identification code and the first message authentication code, or the unique bit string and the identification code in encoded form, to an exchange.--

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--13. (twice amended) The system according to Claim 11, wherein the terminal is arranged to store also, besides the unique bit string and the identification code, a terminal identification code protected with the aid of the first message authentication code or protected by encoding, on the information carrier with memory.--

--14. (twice amended) The system according to Claim 11, wherein the printing device is arranged, after reading the information carrier, to render use of the unique bit string for printing a further franking mark on a further document impossible.--

--15. (twice amended) The system according to Claim 11, wherein the printing device is arranged, after reading the information carrier, to check whether the value of a counter on the information carrier lies within predefined limits, and, if this is the case, to execute step c and to adjust the value of the counter after reading, and, if this is not the case, to block step c.--

--16. (amended) The system according to Claim 10, further comprising a computer and a printing device connected thereto for executing step c.--

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--17. (amended) The system according to Claim 16, wherein the system is provided with means arranged remotely from the computer to send the unique bit string, together with the identification code, protected with a first message authentication code or protected by encoding, to said computer and to send a copy of said data to an exchange.-

--18. (amended) The system according to Claim 16, wherein the computer is provided with means to print, with the aid of the printing device, the unique bit string together with the identification code, protected with a first message authentication code or protected by encoding, on the document, and optionally to send a copy of said data to an exchange.--

--19. (twice amended) The system according to Claim 10, wherein the identification code comprises a user identification code or printer identification code.--

--20. (twice amended) The system according to Claim 10, wherein the system is arranged to calculate and print, on the basis of the franking mark, a second message authentication code or to print the franking mark in encoded form.--

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--21. (twice amended) The system according to Claim 10, wherein the system further comprises a second central memory for storing combinations of identification codes and provided unique bit strings, central input means for inputting franking marks printed on documents, a third central memory for storing the combinations of identification codes and unique bit strings present in the inputted franking marks, and processor means, connected to the central input means and the first, second, and third central memories, for mutually comparing the data in the second and third central memories.--

--22. (amended) A central station comprising:
a first central memory, with a set of unique bit strings,

a second central memory for storing combinations of identification codes and provided unique bit strings, said combinations corresponding with franking marks which are printed on a document,

central input means for inputting franking marks printed on documents,

a third central memory for storing combinations of identification codes and unique bit strings present in the inputted franking marks, and

processor means connected to the central input means and the first, second, and third central memories, for mutually comparing data in the second and third central memories.--

--23. (amended) A device for printing a franking mark on a document, said device including means for receiving data from an information carrier, said data at least comprising a unique bit string originating from a set of unique bit strings, for compiling and making data available for the franking mark for the document in protected form, so that said device can print the franking mark on the document securely, said franking mark at least comprising said data as well as an identification code.--